

we'll live our whole young lives away by TolkienGirl

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Characters: Eleven | Jane Hopper, Jim "Chief" Hopper, Joyce Byers, Mike Wheeler

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Summary:

In the depths, you.

we'll live our whole young lives away

In the depths, a shadow.

In the depths, you.

People only have the words that other people have given them. You had so few. Maybe you'll never catch up, maybe you'll be old one day and go quiet like Mama, trapped in the fluttering lights. Hopper tries to help with that. For two hundred days, even three hundred days, it's enough. You point to the black letters, crawling like ants.

Epiphany. E-piff-unny.

Chartreuse.

Grief.

"G," you say. "Grief. Gone."

Hopper nods.

Later, Mike will look at you, will shine with tears for you, will make it so that words don't matter.

Much later than that, he'll give you a flat green book with a word in black letters on the front.

Poems.

The letters don't crawl. They stay perfectly still.

"Lots of words there," he'll say. And he'll be sixteen when he says it, and you'll know him then, because you're still here.

The shadow was waiting, and the monster wasn't, but you managed

to find them both.

This is you. This is a girl who was gone, a girl who came back and brought the dark things with her.

You have a wound.

Your feet leave the floor and the pain leaves your body and you scream and you scream and you close the wound.

Suture.

“Stitches,” Hopper says. He taps a white line on his thumb. “Stitches for your skin. They keep it closed so it can heal up again.”

“Scar,” you say. You know that one. You have some, from before. You have some, from after. So does Mike. So does everybody.

“Yeah, kid.” Hopper clears his throat. “Leaves a scar. But it’s fine. Doesn’t hurt anymore.”

In the depths, silence.

In the light, silence.

In the moment, you.

The first time Mike kisses you, you don’t even know what it is.

The second time, you kiss him back.

And after that, you keep counting only because you want to, not because you have to.

“Mama.” You put your hands on your knees and they look like anybody else’s hands. “Mama’s gone. In her mind.”

"I'm so sorry," Mike whispers. Mike is soft to you, always, even though he seems taller every time you see him. All the angles of him fit around you. "Are you gonna try to see her again?"

Maybe you are and maybe you aren't. When you think about the room that was supposed to be yours, with the bear and the curtains and the love, love, love, *waiting*—it hurts in the place where the wound must be.

"I don't know."

"I'll go with you." Mike lifts his eyebrows and dips his chin down, a look that means *promise*. "If you want."

"Yes." You want. You want Mike to go with you, even if you're not sure where you're going.

In the night, in the depths, in the dawn—

You don't always have the words.

"College?"

Jonathan and Nancy are there, Steve isn't but that's OK, he says. He works with Hopper now. A deputy.

Joyce lifts a shoulder. She flips the egg in the pan. It is sizzling, and it is for you. "Only if you want."

"Yeah," you say. You say *yeah* now. You're sixteen. The words are easier. "Yeah, I think so. If—"

You mean, *if Mike goes*, because some things do not change.

"You've still got a while to think about it," Joyce says, sliding a blue plate in front of you. "Just thought I'd check in. Want some juice with that? I'm not sure if Hopper talks about it."

“About juice?”

“No, hon. About college.”

“Oh.”

He doesn't, but he would if you asked him. He says he'll try his best to talk about anything, if you ask him.

“Our nerves were frayed like ravelled sleeves,

We cherished each our minor griefs

To keep them warm until the night,

When it was time again to fight;

But we were young, did not need much

To make us laugh instead, and touch,

And could not hear ourselves above

The arias of death and love.”

“That’s a new one,” Mike says. He’s flat on the grass, with one knee crooked skyward. He’s so long, and so close, and you love him.

“It’s about us,” you say.

His eyes flicker over to you, deep and shining. Mike has always liked all the words you say, your own words, and the ones that other people gave you.

“Then it’s awesome.”

He reaches for you and you reach back for him, and you are here, you are here, you are here.